

Trinity 6, 2017

The Rite Church

Genesis 18:1-16 / Romans 4:13-25

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, OR

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Through Adam and Eve, as well as through Noah, there was a progression through the marriage of a man and a woman to procreate a family. These families, learning to work together, would mature into a tribe that would share and work for their survival and stability. These tribes, when successful, would eventually flourish as nations. But, nations rise and fall. Not all nations are fruitful...some could even be described as evil. God's plan from the beginning was, and remains to be, the establishment of a nation that can and will persist in unison with His very Will...and it is the family that God uses as His foundation to build His kingdom and establish His heirs.

In our reading today we met Abraham, but Abraham, in the covenant that God was making with him, had a problem...he and Sarah had no children...they had no family from which to form a tribe. From the Adamic Covenant and through the Noahic Covenant, we are able to grasp how ardently man turns away from God and how persistent God is to set him straight. So, in Genesis 15:5 we see God giving Abraham a promise that he will have heirs enough to produce a nation, *"And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."*

And now, in chapter 18, the Lord tells Abraham that He will return in the appropriate amount of time and Sarah will have a son! Abraham believed God. We all know that Abraham was a man of faith and that this faith was accounted to him as righteousness, but Sarah, on the other hand, remains only in earshot behind the walls, in another room; her convictions not yet so strong. Sarah laughs at the promise while Abraham continues to attend to the needs of his visitors, resting on every word. The story behind the Abrahamic Covenant is well documented in the scriptures illustrating, once again, God's faithfulness and man's failings; remember, Sarah gets discouraged and convinces

Abraham to take Hagar by which to have a child and Ishmael was conceived; but through it all Abraham and Sarah find God's promises to be true...and they bare a son.

The New Testament record concerning Abraham and his seed are found in our second reading; Romans 4:13, *"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."* Faith...faith is how we receive the promises of God, faith is how we access the graces given us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at our baptism, and faith is what separates us from the world and we should ever be mindful that it was through the faith of Abraham that the Holy Nation of God was established!

The faith exhibited by Abraham was a major transition for the children of God that persists unto this very day. When we consider the idolatry of his day and the idol worship of even his own father Terah, which is recorded in the book of Joshua, we should be profoundly moved by Abraham's commitment to leave the norm of his day, forsaking all to follow the Almighty.

(side note: You may find it interesting that the idol worship that Abraham's father Terah was part of was that of that of worshipping the moon as god...the moon god, whose symbol is the crescent moon. I will leave that for you to ponder.)

So, God called Abraham out of an idolatrous people to restore to Himself a people who would also live in the faith of the only true God. We now move from God separating a people from a world worshipping false gods to a people who seek the truth of God through faith in his word. We are witnessing a family...growing to become a nation...a nation that will be The Church.

And what was used to identify the separation of God's people from the idolatrous herd? The mark of the Abrahamic Covenant is found in Genesis 17:10, *"This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised."* Well, that would take some commitment wouldn't it, especially when you realize that Abraham was 90 years old! But, if we

were to study the covenant in depth we would find this requirement of blood shedding to be a unifier in the blood shedding of Christ on Calvary. Blood atonement would remain a constant reminder of mans sin and the leading of sin into death. So, through the Abrahamic Covenant, God's people are separated from the masses by the outward mark of circumcision, grafting them into a larger family, that is becoming a nation unto God. But, we don't hold circumcision as a grafting in any more do we?

Is there another outward expression that brings sinners into the fold of Christ's flock? There is! Listen to Paul's word to the Colossians, *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ"* (Col. 2:10-11). What is Paul saying here? Christ, by fulfilling the Old Covenant requirement of circumcision has established in His New Covenant relationship with mankind a circumcision made without hands...baptism. No longer is blood a requirement for sin, but life in the Holy Nation of God is now found in the water of baptism and that by faith...a faith that finds its foundation in Abraham.

Many denominations today claim sole ownership of the Christian Church. I would claim that there is but one owner and that is God Almighty found in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. If a particular church is found to preach the truth of the Gospel and duly administers the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion, then we can rest in the graces of God in obedience and confidence. John Spalding, a 19th century theologian, describes the church as "the people called out of hedonism, born into the holy nation of God, who receive Christ personally as their redeemer and savior." The Christian, in faith, gives Christ their full allegiance, obey his teachings and rely on His promises. The children of God are received in the symbolic rite of baptism, inviting the Holy Ghost to enter in, and declaring to each participant, a re-birth into their new nation family. Through the grace offered in baptism, they obtain the privilege of the Table of the Lord and remain in covenant with God.

Apart from the Church the Christian ceases to exist. In the framework of scripture the church is not merely a local congregation. It is a community of believers connected to the Lord by the transformation of

their souls and the regeneration of their minds by the graces found in the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion.

The church falters when its message fails to come from a single voice of authority. The church is not a single parish deciding what to believe or a single diocese dictating doctrine, or even a stand alone church body claiming to be the only way; but the church is made up of individuals, forming cities and countries that are under one head and moving in the same direction (family – tribe - nation) all under the authority of Jesus Christ, living lives under the care of the gospel. In our contemporary times we might say that the work of the church is a call to the birth, the care, the feeding and the development of the people of God. The church is the instrument of the regeneration of the world, first found in the faith exemplified in our earthly father Abraham.

In the name of the Father, and of Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.